



SYMBIOSIS

A Quarterly Newsletter for MRCA Volunteers
Fall 2004

Published by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority

Foothill Fire Burns Whitney Canyon

Fire season started early this year. In mid-July the Foothill fire burned 6,060 acres in the San Gabriel Mountains on the edge of Santa Clarita including Whitney, Placerita and Elsmere Canyons. The Nature Center at Placerita Canyon (which reverted back to LA County last February) and the structures at Whitney were saved. The animals at Placerita were evacuated to nearby Hart Park (with the exception of the Rattlesnake who, it was reported, bit the handler the last time he had to be evacuated.) Fortunately, no houses nor human lives were lost.

Last December a number of our volunteers naturalists were trained in Fire Ecology and we are "ready to roll".

Our first FE hike at Whitney was held on Aug 8. We spotted numerous signs of life: fresh gopher burrows, as well as rabbits, towhees, wren-tits, turkey vultures and red and black ants. We also saw bobcat tracks. Stump and seed sprouting was already beginning.

We are offering additional FE Hikes at Whitney Canyon from 7:30-9:00 AM on Aug. 15 & 22. We will offer a volunteers (and friends) only hike on Oct. 2 from 8-9:30 AM.

You can download our Fire Ecology brochure from our website LAMountains.com/involved.asp. And plan on visiting next spring. The wildflowers **will be spectacular.**

Table of Contents

- Feature Story
- From the Editor
- Cyber-teer
- CIG Training
- MBU News
- Chainsaw Class
- Volunteer training schedule
- West Nile Virus
- Science "News You Can Use"
- Take Pride in America Event
- Butterfly Training
- California Condors



From the Editor...

Last month I visited England with my family. Because it's my line of work, I invited (or some might say dragged) everybody to a few museums and I made mental notes of what I saw and what we could use here at our Nature Centers. I saw some amazing uses of technology and whiz-bang special effects. I must confess I was a bit jealous.

But my most memorable interpretive moment occurred in a dusty, cluttered, out-of-the-way museum which was obviously working on a shoe-string budget. I saw a simple B&W photo move a strong, grizzled, grown man to tears.

In a voice struggling for control, I heard him whisper, "She brought me home." During 42 missions over Europe, at a

time when the casualty rate was 10% *per mission*, she brought him home.

Later that night, I nursed a pint of beer and thought about the day. My mind wandered and I thought about my CIG training and what I had

learned there. I remembered what I had momentarily forgotten in the glitzy museums - we have the ability to forge an emotional connection between the audience and the resource...any resource...even a B&W photograph. "Puddin" reminded me it's not about the wiz-bang technology. It's about "bringing it home" for the audience.

Thanks, "Puddin", for bringing my Dad (and me) home.

Cyber-teer....

Internet sites of interest for our volunteers.

Taking a trip out of the area? Interested in your local wildlife? Visit www.enature.com and plug in a zip code. They provide free on-line regional wildlife guides for birds, butterflies, mammals, reptiles and amphibian with full color

photos and descriptions. This site is sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation.

Another great site is the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, www.birds.cornell.edu. They offer a great section on birding basics and an on-line bird guide. For those of you who want to learn to bird by ear, their bird guide also provides a song sample. Or you can purchase their CD, "Bird Songs of California" through their on-line shop.

Certified Interpretive Guide Training at Franklin Canyon....

In August seven volunteers spend four days in CIG training (developed by the National Association for Interpretation). They came away with a tool chest of ideas and techniques they can use to create and deliver programs for our park visitors.

The training focused on the concept of thematic interpretation - the heart of all great interpretive programs. The training also covered learning styles, audience evaluation, the use of tangibles and intangibles, universal concepts, creating and organizing a program, program delivery and my old favorite, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

For NAI certification, each student was required to attend 32 hours of class, take and pass a written test and give a 10 minute interpretive program on the subject of their choice.

Congratulations to a group of hard working volunteers: Steve Iorger, Julia Rittershausen Beers, Judy Ennis, Jim Robertson, Beverly Schurig, Joann Leonard and Gene Foley.





**Summer 2004:
A Season of Working, Learning & FUN!
NPS Volunteer Picnic
Biodiversity Training
Moonlight hikes at ULV (Ahmanson)**





MRCA Volunteers...Making a Difference!

Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority

2600 Franklin Canyon Drive

Beverly Hills, CA 90210

(310) 858-7272 x 133

Wendy.Langhans@mrca.ca.gov

LAMountains.com



The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) is a public entity of the State of California exercising joint powers of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the Conejo Recreation and Park District, and the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District pursuant to Section 6500 et seq. of the Government Code.

To submit an article or information: Contact MRCA Director of Volunteer Services, Wendy Langhans at (310) 858-7272 x 133 or Wendy.Langhans@mrca.ca.gov. Submissions must be received no later than one month prior to publication.

Answer to Wildlife Trivia Question on page 4: C.

MBU News...

The Mountain Bike Unit (MBU) is a volunteer organization that helps the NPS, CA State Parks and MRCA provide public assistance and resource protection in the Santa Monica Mountains.

Editor's note: I was inspired by this story from MBU'er Tom Williams and thought you would be too.

...A group of us did the Redbox to JPL shuttle ride last Saturday. The cast of characters included Peter Kling, Mike Lewis, Matt Earl, Ted Schumacher, Alan Takahashi, and Randal (a friend of Alan's), and myself... Our group passed a man I will refer to as "OD". OD was riding without water, without a helmet, and worst of all with his sweatshirt dangling from his handlebars. As the group passed OD he sped up and briefly retook the lead. But his sweat shirt dangled out a little too far. The front tire grabbed the sweatshirt and attempted to force it through the brake boss of the front fork. It was a simple case of either too much sweatshirt or not enough space between the tire and brakes. Either way the result was the same: the wheel froze and the entire bike pivoted, pitching OD head first into the asphalt.

OD had an egg shaped knot the size of a small fist protruding from his forehead. He appeared to have either a broken collar bone or dislocated shoulder. He was conscious but disorientated.

Ted and I were just riding up and did not witness the accident since we took a bonus single track. But what I did witness filled me with a sense of PRIDE. I watched my friends whom I helped train jump into action, even though they were not on patrol. (I should mention that there were other people who just looked and kept walking or riding).

Peter Kling called 911. It took awhile but once connected with the dispatcher he was clear, calm, and concise. (Trainer Robert Heagy would have been proud.) We broke out first aid kits (which most of us carry all of the time.) Ted gloved up and cleaned the blood from OD's wound. Ted and Matt also kept talking to OD who kept nodding as if he wanted to go to sleep.

I helped Mike extricate the sweatshirt from OD's bike. OD, like any good mountain biker, was more concerned about his bike than himself. When we finished fixing the bike Mike and I rode to the street to direct emergency crews.

THANK YOU MBU and all its leaders. So many times nothing happens on patrol. Yet the training you gave us doesn't leave us when we take off the uniform. We take it to the store, our family get-togethers, restaurants, and wherever we go. It's comforting to know that when the pressure is on we have the training necessary to possibly save a life.

Proud to be a member of the MBU!

Wildland Fire Chainsaw Class held at Towsley Canyon...



Last month the MRCA, in coordination with its internal Park Training Institute (PTI) offered a specialized three-day training course on Wildland Fire chain saw usage. Ranger David Updike recruited Dan Hull, the Western United States Field Application Manager from Stihl Inc., to co-teach this course. Stihl Inc. is the leading seller of chainsaws in the world and Dan Hull has over fifteen years of experience working with the company and has provided training to firefighters, fire departments, park and forestry agencies and the general public.

Students participated in a three-day course combining classroom lessons and practical field experience covering maintenance, operation, and safety precautions. The training enabled each student to efficiently utilize their chain saws, limit the amount of wear and tear, cut down on replacement costs, and repair and maintain their own saws.

Students completing this course had the opportunity to test
Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3.

for certification as a Class A Faller, and S-212 Wildland Fire Chain Saw operator.

The MRCA will be offering additional training that will cover portable pump operations, water usage, class-A foam including CAF systems, and S190 (Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior). Contact Dave Updike, (310) 858-7272 x 123, for details.



MRCA volunteer training...

New Volunteer Training. It's not too late for new and existing volunteers to sign up for our last two training sessions at Franklin Canyon for school volunteers. Contact Rebecca Farr at 310-858-2727 x 132.

- September 11, 9-1, K-2nd grade School Program.
- September 18, 9-1, 5-6th grade School Program

Fire Ecology Hike. We will be offering a volunteers-only (and their guests) fire ecology hike at Whitney Canyon on Saturday, October 2 from 8:00 to 9:30 AM. We will meet at the junction of Hwy 14 and San Fernando Road in Santa Clarita. Call Wendy Langhans at 661-255-3606 to reserve a space.

Reptiles and Amphibians of Upper Las Virgenes Canyon Watershed. Dr. Russell Smith from the LA Zoo will be offering a workshop at ULV (Ahmanson) on Saturday, November 6 from 10-12 AM.. Call Wendy Langhans at 661-255-3606 to reserve a space and for driving directions to the ranch house. As a teaser, here's a

WILDLIFE TRIVIA QUESTION (answer on last page)

How many species of reptiles are there in the world?

- | | |
|----------|------------|
| a - 1200 | c - 7400 |
| b - 3000 | d - 10,700 |

West Nile Virus.....

West Nile Virus has been in the news recently and cases have been documented in Southern California. We want to present factual information to our volunteers and to the public without causing panic, so we recommend that you check with your own personal health provider and visit the Center for Disease Control website for more information: www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/westnile/. According to the CDC, "Most human WNV infections cause either no symptoms or a mild flu-like illness." But a few people, especially the elderly or those with weak immune systems, will have a more severe reaction and it can be fatal. Since WNV is transmitted by mosquitoes, the CDC recommends ways you can protect yourself: wear long sleeve shirts and pants and use DEET as a repellent. If you lead a hike, you can encourage but not require your participants to do the same.

Science "News You Can Use" ...

A information you can use to expand of your programs and perhaps get you thinking in new directions.

How do animals see in the dark?

Animals that are active at night are called nocturnal and have eyes designed to see in dim light. First, they have very large pupils. Remember, the pupil lets light into the eye. So, the bigger the pupil, the more light can get in.

Nocturnal animals also have eyes packed with rods (photoreceptors in the retina at the back of the eye), which work best in low light and are not color sensitive. They usually have very few cones (photoreceptors responsible for color vision and fine detail). As a result, most nocturnal animals don't see in color nor get the sharp view that comes from having lots of cones. To make up for this, nocturnal animals usually have big eyes with big retinas. The image on the retina is larger, which makes it clearer.

Nocturnal animals have one other trick for seeing well in the dark. It's a mirror-like layer below the retina called a tapetum (tah-PEE-tem). The tapetum reflects light back to the retina. This gives the retina an extra chance to collect information about the image the eye is seeing. When light reflects off the tapetum, an animal's eyes seem to glow.

Abridged from "Duck's Unlimited" website: www.Greenwing.org

Take Pride in America.....



Franklin Canyon was the May kick-off point for "Take Pride in America", a national partnership that recruits, supports and recognizes volunteers who work to improve our public lands. With 100 Charter Partners, Take Pride involves federal, state and local governments; conservation, youth and recreation groups; and top national corporations and organizations. Our MRCA volunteers worked with the NPS and Disney Volunteers to refurbish the picnic tables and do a bit of trail maintenance. Clint Eastwood, the national spokesman, was on hand to lend support.

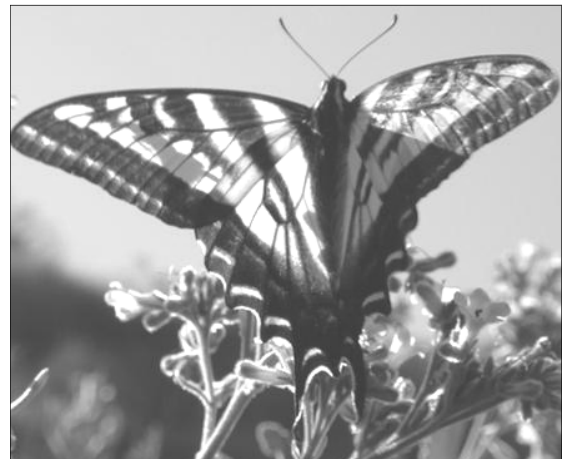


Butterfly Training at Franklin Canyon.....



"Butterflies Hide in Plain Sight" was the theme of our Butterfly workshop earlier this month in Franklin Canyon. Dr. Paul Levine, a cardiologist and amateur butterfly enthusiast, provided volunteers with a program they can give at any of our parkland in southern California.

Consider this Pale Swallowtail butterfly Paul photographed at Towsley Canyon. Those tails serve a purpose, just like the breakaway jerseys worn by a football player. A bird, mistaking the butterfly's tail for an antenna, will "tackle" the butterfly where it *thinks* the head is located (which, of course, is highly illegal in football). The tail rips off and the butterfly escapes, just like a running back escapes the tackle.



The program is designed to be given either in the field or at a Nature Center and is also on PowerPoint. We have hard copies you can borrow at Franklin and at Towsley Nature Centers. Stop by and check it out.

California Condors.....

Last month there was an interesting exchange during docent Roger McClure's bird hike at Towsley Canyon. Visitors were observing Turkey Vultures fly overhead.

Visitor 1: "How can you tell the difference between a Turkey Vulture and a California Condor?"

Roger: "Well...condors are very rare. But you can tell them by the bright white markings under the wing."

Visitor 2: "You mean, like that one over there?"

Immediately, every binocular shifted direction.

Roger (admirably keeping his composure): "Uh...yeah, just like that one."



Photo taken in July 2004 near Big Sur, CA by Susana Campbell.

Recently there were three reported sightings in the Santa Clarita Woodlands: Roger McClure (1 bird at Towsley on 7-17 at approx. 9:30 AM), Ranger Jodi Thomas (2 birds over East/Rice on 8-4 at 10:00 AM) and Wendy Langhans (2 birds over Towsley on 8-4 at 10:05 AM).

Since we know they're here, let's learn more about them.

The California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) is a member of the Vulture Family (but genetically related to storks). It is the largest flying bird in North America, with a wingspan of up to 9 1/2 feet and weighing 20-25 pounds. They are incredible fliers and can soar for hours on thermals, reaching speeds of 55 mph and altitudes of 15,000 feet.

According to Jodi Thomas, on soaring adults you can see a triangular "white on black" patch under the wing. (A Turkey Vulture, by contrast, is "black on white".)

Juveniles are all black for the first two years. Then they begin to turn pinkish orange on their head and neck and reach full color by their 5th summer. They can live 20 years in the wild and from 40 to 60 years in captivity.

Condors reach sexual maturity between ages six to eight. During courtship they puff out their throat pouch and their skin turns deep red-pink. (Can't you just imagine that new blusher from Revlon - "Hot Condor Pink"?)

They don't build true nests but roost in caves and overhanging cliffs. They produce one egg every other year between January and March. Like penguins, the parents take turns incubating the egg on top of their feet for about 2 months. Condor chicks leave the nest after about two months but remain in nearby where they are fed by their parents. The chick takes its first flight at about six to seven months and becomes independent the following year. Chicks learn from their parents how to fly and find food.

Condors are scavengers and eat carrion (dead animals) and trash. They don't eat every day but can consume 2-3 lbs at a sitting. They don't have strong sense of smell which is probably a good thing, considering where they stick their heads. Condors rely on sight, sometimes following other birds to food. Being the original "Big Bird", once they arrive they have no problem getting their fair share. After eating, they clean their heads by rubbing them on grass, shrubs and rocks.

Condors are social birds and roost together in large groups. They are also curious and bold, since they have few natural enemies. They do not have vocal cords but communicate by forcing air through their bodies to make hissing and grunting noises. I can relate to this - have you ever watched a young boy place his hand in his armpit and make noises by flapping his arm up and down?

As of July 2004, there are 248 birds in the world (99 in the wild): Central CA (Big Sur) - 24, Southern CA (Sespe) - 20 plus 3 nestlings, Baja California - 5, and Arizona - 47. It doesn't seem like a lot, but it's better now than in 1987, when there were only 27. In California the goal is to establish two separate wild populations of at least 150 birds (with 15 breeding pairs). We've got a ways yet to go.

You can help by picking up trash (Condors eat trash), staying 100 feet away (so they don't get habituated to humans), supporting a ban on lead gun pellets (hunters sometimes leave their kill, which gets eaten by Condors) and, of course, support the creation of open space.